DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 431 581 RC 022 028

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Long, Vonda; Scherer, David |
| TITLE | Four Step Model for Experiential Counseling. |
| INSTITUTION | Association for Experiential Education, Boulder, CO. |
| PUB DATE | 1998-11-00 |
| NOTE | 4p.; In: Selected Monographs from the Association for Experiential Education International Conference (26th, Incline Village, Nevada, November 5-9, 1998); see RC 022 022. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | AEE, 2305 Canyon Blvd., Suite 100, Boulder, CO 80302-5651; Tel: 303-440-8844 ($2.50). |
| PUB TYPE | Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150) |
| EDRS PRICE | EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Adventure Education; Communication Skills; *Counseling Techniques; Counselor Client Relationship; Counselor Role; *Experiential Learning; *Group Counseling; Individual Development; *Outdoor Leadership; Theory Practice Relationship |

ABSTRACT

As experiential counseling gains wider acceptance, it becomes more important to operate from a structural framework promoting effective and ethical practices. This paper outlines a four-part model of experiential counseling: theoretical foundations, experiential activity and personnel, processing and communication skills, and prerequisites for participant safety. Advantages to using outdoor experiential pursuits as the basis for counseling are discussed. The importance of working from a theoretical base is emphasized, and several theories of psychotherapy are noted that advocate for the use of experience as a therapeutic agent. The experiential activity itself is a catalyst for the counseling process, with the focus and time spent on the activity varying considerably. The multiple professional roles involved in experiential counseling are listed, as are support personnel that may be needed. Processing is the core element in experiential counseling, and various communication skills are needed to provide an effective intervention. These skills include listening, centering (to maintain counselor's emotional balance), empathizing, focusing clients' attention, and providing clients with directional support. Foundations of experiential counseling that safeguard clients' physical and emotional safety include risk assessment and management, informed consent, preparation for potential rescue in either the physical or emotional realm, training in emergency medicine, and attention to ethical concerns. Contains 14 references. (SV)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

Ref# C101198

November 1998

# Four Step Model for Experiential Counseling

Vonda Long, Ph.D. & David Scherer, Ph.D.

ED 431 581

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Juliet Bonnell

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

RC 022028



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

# Four Step Model for Experiential Counseling

Vonda Long, Ph.D. & David Scherer, Ph.D.

Experiential counseling is a powerful treatment modality, and its range of application continues to grow. As it gains wider acceptance and use, it becomes more important than ever to operate from a structural framework promoting effective and ethical practice. This monograph presents a four-step model for experiential counseling for this purpose. Due to space limitations, these components are not addressed in depth, but rather are introduced in the form of structural guidelines. It is incumbent upon the reader to gain appropriate knowledge and training in each area.

**Experiential Counseling Defined**

Experiential counseling is defined here as: "1) the process of counseling (the intentional, systematic, skill-based facilitation of client growth toward improved psychological health using specific focal, ethical, and logistical parameters) using 2) experiential activity as a specific technique to facilitate growth" (Long, 1997, pg. 15).

**Rationale for Experiential Counseling**

There are several advantages to using experiential pursuits (here, specifically "outdoor experiential pursuits), including the lure of adventure, the healing quality of outdoor experience, and the high level of engagement derived from the novelty of the experience (Ewert, 1989; Gass, 1993; Kimball & Bacon, 1993; Miles, 1987). Three additional reasons include: 1) Experiential counseling is a "multi-media" event that engages people psychologically, socially, educationally, and physically (Ewert, 1989). 2) Experiential counseling is based on a skill-building model that emphasizes competence by using a client's relative strengths and abilities as a foundation for building new capabilities and fostering empowerment. 3) Experiential counseling is typically carried out in a social context. Members of experiential counseling groups have to struggle with balancing individual needs and desires with their responsibility to the welfare of the group (Gass, 1993).

**Four Step Model Components**

The components of the four step model presented here reflect basic aspects of experiential counseling. These represent a structure and guideline for operationalizing an experiential program. The four components are: 1) theoretical foundation, 2) experiential activity, 3) processing, and 4) pre-requisite foundations (safety, rescue, emergency-medical, ethics, and legal issues) (Long, 1997). Each is briefly introduced below.

**Theoretical Foundations**

Several prominent theories of psychotherapy advocate for the use of experience as a therapeutic agent, including Jungian therapy, Gestalt therapies, psychodrama and other expressive therapies, family therapies, and child play therapy. Unfortunately, the importance of theory is often overlooked by experiential facilitators. Working from a theoretical base is what provides direction, clarity, and continuity to therapeutic interventions.

There are a variety of theories of counseling that may appeal to experiential counselors, including psychodynamic, humanistic, cognitive-behavioral, and family systems approaches. Each of these has variations that can apply to experiential programs. For example, Transactional Analysis (Harris 1969; Berne, 1996) is an interpretation of basic psychodynamic principles that could readily be applied in adventure and wilderness counseling settings. Rogerian therapies founded on humanistic principles feature reflective and empathic listening and unconditional positive regard that have been the mainstay of micro-counseling skills training (Carkhuff, 1987). Several types of cognitive-behavioral approaches, such as Ellis' RET (Ellis & Dryden, 1987) could readily be adapted for use by experiential counselors. Although many family therapies involve more complexity and require specialized training, the communications work of Satir (Satir, 1972) and perhaps even the family genogram work featured in Bowenian Therapy (Kerr & Bowen, 1988) popularized in Lerner's books (1985, 1989) could be used in experiential counseling.

**Experiential Activity and Personnel**

In experiential counseling, "experiential" is the adjective. The primary focus or purpose is the counseling. The experiential activity is simply the catalyst for the counseling. It is the catalyst for the growth or learning process. As such, it is the means not the end in itself.

In using the experiential activity as a catalyst for the counseling process the focus and time spent on the activity itself may very considerably. The counseling process begins as soon as the clients decide to participate in the experiential program. It should begin with an orientation, and continue through client preparation for the activity, during the activity, and following the activity. With the primary focus on the processing, it is even possible that the group engages very little, or not at all in the activity itself. Simply preparing for the activity or arriving at the site, e.g., a high ropes course, may effectively serve as a catalyst for major processing without setting foot on the ladder.

Experiential counseling involves multiple professional roles. These include: 1) program leader—the overall sponsor, 2) program counselor—the one qualified, trained, and responsible for the overall counseling process, and 3) experiential activity leader—the professional qualified and trained to instruct, guide and lead the activity. Support personnel may include the following where appropriate: 1) activity assistants, 2) rescue staff, and 3) emergency medical staff.

**Processing and Communication Skills**

Of the four components, processing is the core element in experiential counseling. Without processing, the growth and learning from an experiential activity is left to chance. While processing is clearly a whole field unto itself and the central core of counseling, and communication skills are common to most forms of psychotherapy, Long (1996) has organized communication skills into a five-step model that when performed sequentially provides an effective means of intervening with clients.



RC 022028

The first step is to *listen*. Listening requires careful attention to and concentration on clients' verbal and nonverbal communications.

The second step is *centering*. What clients tell counselors is often emotionally profound, sometimes reprehensible, and potentially disturbing to the counselor. Counselors need to feel well-grounded and emotionally balanced to cope with the intensity of their clients' thoughts and feelings, otherwise they may react in ways that are counter-productive.

The third step is *empathizing*. People want to be understood. Good counselors offer this understanding to their clients by trying to understand reality from their clients' perspective. Empathizing does not necessarily mean agreeing with or condoning a client's actions, but it does mean a willingness to understand the client's thoughts, feelings and behaviors.

The fourth step is *focusing*. Counselors help clients develop self-understanding by steering clients' attention to particular aspects of their lives. Often focusing requires the counselor to assist clients in seeing the connections between their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and the associations between their past and their present.

The fifth step is offering clients *directional support*, and follow through. Once clients have clarity on their issues, counselors can assist them in developing options, seeing parallels between the experiential activity and the rest of their lives, and implement change in their lives.

**Pre-Requisite Foundations**

Pre-requisite foundations include those aspects that are essential to safe-guarding the physical and emotional safety of the participants. These include but are not limited to the following:

*Safety*. Providing for participant safety is the first prerequisite. This means both physical and emotional safety. While there obviously is a certain amount of inherent risk in all physical activities, it is the leader's responsibility to 1) "do everything reasonably-possible to ensure safety and minimize risk in a given activity... and 2) do everything possible to inform participants of potential safety hazards and consequences...and empower them in making informed...decisions" (Long, 1997, p. 84).

*Rescue*. Being prepared for a potential rescue is essential to the safety pre-requisite. This needs to include both physical and emotional realms. Potential emotional "rescue" would address what the leader(s) would do in the event of anything from mild anxiety to emotional/psychological decomposition. Potential physical rescue would address what the leader(s) would do in the event of anything from minor or major equipment failure or loss, to participant injury or incapacitation.

*Emergency Medicine*. Experiential programs need to have personnel trained in emergency medicine adequate to address medical emergencies that might arise during the activity. *Ethics & Legal Issues.*

In addition to the Ethical Standards published by the American Counseling Association (1988), to which counselors must adhere, there are several ethical and legal issues unique to experiential counseling which need special attention. These include, but are not limited to: 1) dual relationships, given the potential for spending nights and multiple days with clients, 2) inappropriate pressure or coercion, 3) physical contact, 4) appropriate risk-benefit analysis, 5) informed consent and 6) potential misrepresentation, e.g., counselors misrepresenting their qualification to instruct and/or guide physical activities; technical experts misrepresenting their qualification to counsel participants.

**Summary**

Experiential counseling is a specific counseling approach, which includes four basic components: theoretical framework, an experiential activity, process facilitation and pre-requisite foundations (safety, rescue, emergency medical, ethical and legal guidelines). Personnel necessarily includes multiple professional roles. The primary focus is on the facilitation of learning and personal growth, using the activity as a catalyst for that process.

**References**


Berne, (1996). *Games people play: The psychology of human relationships*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Carkhuff, R. R. (1987). *The art of helping [6th edition]*. Amherst MA: Human Resource Development Press.

Ellis, A. & Dryden, W. (1987). *The practice of rational emotive therapy (RET)*. New York: Springer Publishing Co.

Ewert, A. W. (1989). *Outdoor adventure pursuits: Foundations, models, and theories*. Columbus, OH: Publishing Horizons

Gass, M. A. (1993). Foundations of adventure therapy. In M. A. Gass (Ed.), *Adventure therapy: Therapeutic applications of adventure programming* (pp. 3-10). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

Lerner, H. G. (1985). *The dance of anger: A woman's guide to changing the patterns of intimate relationships*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.

Lerner, H. G. (1989). *The dance of intimacy: A woman's guide to courageous acts of changein key relationships*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.

Harris, T. A. (1969). *I'm OK, you're OK: A practical guide to transactional analysis*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.

Kerr, M. E. & Bowen, M. (1988). *Family evaluation*. New York: Norton & Co.

Kimball, R. O. & Bacon, S. B. (1993). The wilderness challenge model. In M. A. Gass (Ed.), *Adventure therapy: Therapeutic applications of adventure programming* (pp. 11-41). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

Long, V. (1996). *Communication skills in helping relationships*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Co.

Long, V. (1997). *Experiential counseling: Using activity as a catalyst in helping relationships*. Pacific Grove, CA: ITP/Brooks/Cole

Miles, J. (1987). Wilderness as healing place. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 10, 4-10.

Satir, V. (1972). Peoplemaking. Palo Alto, CA: *Science and Behavior Books*.


©1998 by The Association for Experiential Education. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission of the copyright owner. Additional copies of this monograph are available from the Association for Experiential Education. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the positions or policy of AEE.



BEST COPY AVAILABLE